

# Social and emotional development

Theories focusing on adulthood

# Erikson's Middle Adulthood

## ***Generativity versus stagnation stage***

- *People consider their contributions to family, community, work, and society.*
- **Generativity** = looking beyond oneself to continuation of one's life through others
- **Stagnation** = focusing on the triviality of their life

# Erikson's Last Stage

## ***Ego-integrity versus despair stage***

*Process of looking back over one's life, evaluating it, and coming to terms with it*

### **– Integrity**

- Comes when people feel they have realized and fulfilled the possibilities that have come their way

### **– Despair**

- Occurs when people feel dissatisfied with their life, and experience gloom, unhappiness, depression, anger, or the feeling that they have failed

# Erikson's Approach in Perspective

- Influential
- Comprehensive; covers entire life span
- Not everyone passes through stages at same time
- Contemporary research provides refinement and alternative approaches

# Building on Erikson's Views: Gould, Vaillant, and Levinson

# Psychiatrist Roger Gould

Adults pass through series of seven, age-related stages

People in late 30s and early 40s begin to feel sense of urgency in attaining life's goals

Descriptions not research supported



# Gould's Transformations in Adult Development

TABLE

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Gould's Transformations in Adult Development

STAGE	APPROXIMATE AGE	DEVELOPMENT(S)
1	16 to 18	Desire to escape parental control
2	18 to 22	Leaving the family; peer group orientation
3	22 to 28	Developing independence; commitment to a career and to children
4	29 to 34	Questioning self; role confusion; marriage and career vulnerable to dissatisfaction
5	35 to 43	Period of urgency to attain life's goals; awareness of time limitation; realignment of life's goals
6	43 to 53	Settling down; acceptance of one's life
7	53 to 60	More tolerance; acceptance of past; less negativism; general mellowing

Source: From *Transformations*, by R. L. Gould & M. D. Gould, 1978, New York: Simon & Schuster.

# George Valliant

## ***Keeping meaning versus rigidity***

Occurs between the ages of 45 and 55

Adults seek to extract meaning from their lives by accepting strengths and weaknesses of others

Those who are rigid become increasingly isolated from others



# Levinson

## ***Seasons of Life Theory***

Most people are susceptible to fairly profound midlife crisis

- Late 30s
- Early 40s
- Between 40 and 45

# Midlife Crisis

- *Stage of uncertainty and indecision brought about by realization that life is finite*
  - Gender differences
  - Despite widespread acceptance, evidence for midlife crisis does not exist

# Non-Midlife Life Crisis

- For majority of people, transition is smooth and rewarding
- Many middle-aged people find their careers have blossomed
- They feel younger than they actually are

# PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

*Does personality change or remain stable over the course of development?*

- Erikson and Levinson = substantial change
- Paul Costa and Robert McCrae = stability in traits across development

# Continuity and Change in Personality

- Fundamental continuity to personality
- Profound social environmental changes throughout adulthood may produce fluctuations and changes in personality
- Some discontinuities in development

# Personality in Late Adulthood

## Robert Peck

*Personality development in elderly people is occupied by three major developmental tasks or challenges*

- Redefinition of self-versus-preoccupation-with-work-role
- Body-transcendence-versus-body-preoccupation
- Ego-transcendence-versus-ego-preoccupation



# Daniel Levinson

*People enter late adulthood by passing through transition stage*

- View themselves as being “old”
- Recognize stereotypes and loss of power and respect
- Serve as resources to younger individuals
- Discover new freedom to do things for simple sake of enjoyment and pleasure

# Life Review and Reminiscence

## *Common Theme of Personality Development*

Triggered by increasingly obvious prospect of one's death

Provides better understanding of the past

Resolves lingering problems and conflicts

Leads to a sense of sharing, mutuality, and feeling of interconnectedness with others